

(the blackness that penetrates Eli's soul, which no amount of modern drugs can anaesthetize). Far from denying his identity, Roth resurrects a form of Jewishness based on spirituality, religiosity, and historicity, "defending the faith," as it were, from those who would pervert it in the interest of strategy ("Defender of the Faith"), riches ("Goodbye, Columbus"), or modernity ("Eli, the Fanatic"). In so doing, Roth truly offers his readers what the new preface calls "folk fiction."

And yet, for all the suffering many of these early characters undergo in order to arrive at a sense of "cultural unity," a comparison with later Roth protagonists

shows how relatively uncomplicated their early struggles are. Because most of the former exist in a kind of social limbo, emotionally unaffiliated with any one group, a decision to embrace a Jewish identity is a wholly personal affair of little social consequence. (The character closest to a social set, Eli Peck, has had misgivings about his profession and his community that predate the yeshiva controversy.) It would not be until Roth's later works that the potential conflict between vocation and cultural unity would be explored, when, as in *The Ghost Writer*, stories about Jewish families would be branded "transgressions of

family decency and trust," when artistic creativity would endanger the artist's relations with his parents, when, in short, the "high altar of art" would be set alongside—and possibly against—the "high altar of the temple." "You are not somebody who writes this kind of story," a father would say to his son, to which Nathan Zuckerman would reply, "I am." But how does one prove how manifold, and often contradictory, the elements that comprise that "I" are? All Eli Peck had to do was change into the clothes of a refugee. Twenty years later, it would take more than clothes to make the man. ■

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